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ABSTRACT

In order to assess young children's conceptions of "pretty" and "ugly", twenty-nine 5- and 6-year-old children (14 male and 15 female) were asked to draw a pretty person and an ugly person. These drawings were scored for developmental maturity according to Goodenough Draw-A-Man Test and for emotionality by means of the Koppitz Scale of Emotional Indicators. The data confirmed that young children do make discriminations on the basis of physical attractiveness that affect their drawings. The children's drawings of an ugly person reflected a lower level of developmental maturity ("p" < .001) and greater emotionality ("p" < .001) than drawings of a pretty person. These differences between pretty-person and ugly-person drawings suggest that young children have a well-developed concept of physical attractiveness that conforms to the cultural stereotype found in older children and adults, in which "ugly" produces more primitive and emotional responding than "pretty". The results underscore the need to be alert to the presence of transient emotional states in the testing of young children. (Author/MP)

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Young Children's Conception of Physical Attractiveness as Evidenced in Human Figure Drawings

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YOUNG CHILDREN'S CONCEPTION OF PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AS EVIDENCED IN HUMAN FIGURE DRAWINGS

In an effort to assess young children's conceptions of "pretty" and "ugly", 29 five- and six-year-old children (14 male and 15 female) were asked to draw a pretty person and an ugly person. These drawings were scored for developmental maturity according to the Goodenough Draw-A-Man Test and for emotionality by means of the Koppitz Scale of Emotional Indicators. The data confirmed that young children do make discriminations on the basis of physical attractiveness that affect their drawings. The children's drawings of an ugly person reflected a lower level of developmental maturity ($p < .001$) and greater emotionality ($p < .001$) than drawings of a pretty person. These differences between pretty-person and ugly-person drawings suggest that young children have a well-developed concept of physical attractiveness that conforms to the cultural stereotype found in older children and adults, in which "ugly" produces more primitive and emotional responding than "pretty". As a practical matter, the results underscore the need to be alert to the presence of transient emotional states in the testing of young children.

Physical attractiveness has provided an impetus for much research in recent years. Most of this research has centered on the attributions that people bestow upon physically attractive or unattractive indivudals (e.g. Dion, Berscheid, and Walster, 1972; Miller, 1970). A general conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that physically attractive persons are seen in a positive light and attributed a wide range of positively valued characteristics, such as sociability and high intelligence. Physically unattractive persons, on the other hand, are associated with a long string of negative emotions and traits that have little or nothing to do with physical appearance.

Several studies have specifically looked at children's conceptions of attractiveness. Cavior and Lombardi (1973) found that children as young as six years of age use criteria similar to those of adults in judging physical attractiveness, and by eight years of age use the same criteria as adults. Dion (1973) also has shown that preschool children can discriminate differences in physical attractiveness in much the same manner as adults, and like adults, make attributions based on facial characteristics.

Another aspect of attractiveness that has received attention has been the search for determinants of facial beauty (McCullers and Staat, 1974). This research has utilized a drawing methodology to try to identify the characteristics that cause a person to be seen as physically attractive or unattractive. These researchers found a fairly consistent tendency for smaller noses and mouths to be associated with drawings of attractive persons.

The present study utilized the human figure drawing methodology to investigate the conception of "pretty" and "ugly" in nursery-school children. It was expected that the children would reveal their conception

of physical attractiveness through differences in their drawings. In an effort to quantify these differences, the Goodenough Draw-A-Man Test (Goodenough, 1926) and the Koppitz Scale of Emotional Indicators (Koppitz, 1968) were used. The Goodenough Test was used to yield a measure of developmental maturity for each drawing and the Koppitz Scale an emotionality score. It was hypothesized that five- and six-year-old children not only would adequately discriminate between pretty and ugly but that this distinction would be reflected in lower developmental and higher emotionality scores on the ugly-person drawing than on the drawing of the pretty person.

This hypothesis was based on the assumption that the young child responds to "pretty" and "ugly" in ways consistent with the views of society in general. To the extent that "ugly" evokes unpleasant feelings, the child should be less willing to spend time and effort on the ugly-person drawing than on the pretty-person drawing. This should result in less detail in the ugly-person drawing which, in terms of the Draw-A-Man test, would lead to a lower estimate of developmental maturity. Similarly, the negative affect associated with "ugly" should be expressed to some degree in ways similar to those used by children suffering from chronic negative affect (emotional problems). Thus, the ugly-person drawings should contain more emotional indicators than pretty-person drawings when evaluated by means of the Koppitz scale.

Method

Subjects

The sample consisted of all the five- and six-year-old children in attendance at a predominantly white, middle-class day care center in Norman,

Oklahoma. This group of children included three four-year-olds who were also tested so as not to feel excluded. However, due to the general unreliability of human figure drawings below the age of five years, the four-year-old data were not included in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 29 children, 14 boys (4 six-year-olds and 10 five-year-olds) and 15 girls (4 six-year-olds and 11 five-year-olds). Because of the small number of six-year-olds, distributed evenly between the sexes, no attempt was made to distinguish between five- and six-year olds for the purposes of this study. The mean age of the children was 69.4 months, with a range from 62 to 76 months.

The Instruments

The Goodenough Draw-A-Man Test. This scale was constructed such that in general the greater the amount of elaboration and detail in the drawings, the larger the number of developmental indicators present. The greater the number of developmental indicators, the higher will be the estimate of the child's level of developmental maturity, and consequently mental age.

The Draw-A-Man Test is an old instrument that has been used widely for more than 50 years. It was revised and extended by Harris (1963) as the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test. The reliability of the Draw-A-Man Test has been well established. For example, McCarthy (1944) reported correlations between repeated scorings by the same person of +.94 and between scorings by different persons of +.90; McCarthy obtained a split-half reliability of +.89. Smith (1937) reported test-retest reliabilities above +.91 for all except the oldest children in a study of children ranging from six to 15 years of age. In the original standardization study, Goodenough noted a tendency for girls, particularly at the younger ages, to score higher than boys and for boys to have somewhat more variable scores. Validity coefficients vary widely, depending on the ages of the subjects and the criterion measure employed.

Several investigators have reported validity estimates ranging from +.60 to +.72 between the drawing scale and Stanford-Binet performance (e.g., Williams, 1935; Yepsen, 1929; McElwee, 1932). Pihl and Nimrod (1976) and Riesman and Yamakowski (1973) provide more recent evidence of the reliability and validity of the instrument.

The Koppitz Human Figure Drawing Test. This test was designed to be used both as a developmental and a projective measure. Similar to the Draw-A-Man Test, the Koppitz scale uses developmental indicators to provide a measure of mental maturity. The scale of emotional indicators provides a basis for clinical interpretation of children's human figure drawings. This scale provides a measure of emotionality that is thought to reflect the anxieties, unconscious needs, conflicts, and personality traits of the children. The Koppitz scale takes developmental changes in drawing skill into account so that emotionality scores are not merely a redundant reflection of developmental level.

Koppitz (1968) provides normative information on the reliability and validity of the scale. A normative study was based on the drawings of 1856 public school children, drawn from kindergarten through sixth grade in 10 different schools. The sample included children from black and white; urban, small town, and rural; and high-, middle-, and low-income families in different geographical areas of the country. There were approximately equal numbers of boys and girls at each age level from 5 through 12 years. Koppitz reports that two examiners checked 467 items for the presence or absence of 30 developmental items and 30 emotional indicators and showed agreement on 444 or 95% of the items. Drawing scores were found to correlate significantly with WISC Full Scale and with Stanford-Binet IQ scores at approximately the same levels (e.g., +.60s) reported by Goodenough; the coefficients range

from +.45 to +.80 depending on age level and criterion measure. In agreement with Goodenough, Koppitz also found that drawings by girls in the primary grades were superior to those of boys.

A series of investigations by Koppitz (e.g., 1966) and other researchers (e.g., Snyder and Gaston, 1970) have shown that emotional indicators occur significantly more often in the human figure drawings of children who are psychiatric patients than in the drawings of normal, well-adjusted children; also, children with emotional problems have significantly higher numbers of emotional indicators in their drawings than do children without emotional problems. The presence or absence of emotional indicators has been shown to discriminate adequately between shy and aggressive children, as well as between children who are high and low in school achievement, particularly at the kindergarten through second-grade levels.

Scoring. All drawings were scored for developmental level via the Goodenough Draw-A-Man Test and for emotional indicators via the Koppitz scale. Scoring followed the standard format prescribed in the manuals for these instruments.

The drawings were scored by two judges without knowledge of the experimental hypotheses or instructions to the subjects concerning the drawings. The interrater reliability correlations were +.94 for the emotional indicators and +.96 for the developmental indicators. The few discrepancies between the two judges were referred to a third judge to arrive at final scores for data analysis.

Procedure

Each child was escorted from the central activity room to another room in the same building and tested individually by a male experimenter. In the first session, which was used to establish rapport and acquaint the child

with the situation, the child was asked to "draw-a-person". These preliminary drawings provided a baseline measure of the child's drawing under standard test conditions. All children were capable of performing the task. Approximately one week later, the same experimenter asked each child individually to "draw a pretty (or ugly) person." Upon completion of this first drawing, the child was asked to "draw an ugly (or pretty) person." The order of the two drawings was counterbalanced such that for half of the children the initial drawing was of an ugly person and for half the intitial drawing was of a pretty person.

Results and Discussion

A preliminary visual inspection of the drawings was made to see if the children produced different drawings under the two sets of instructions. On the average, the drawings of the pretty person were clearly different from the drawings of the ugly person (see Figure 1). Children often showed a frown,

Insert FIGURE 1 about here

on the face of the ugly person and a smile on the pretty person. Some children spontaneously commented during the session that to be ugly meant to have spots, to be wrinkled, to be fat, or to be mad.

The more objective measures used in this study also revealed differences in the children's drawings of pretty and ugly persons. There was a greater mean number of developmental indicators in the pretty-person drawings than in the ugly-person drawings of both boys (10.86 for pretty and 9.00 for ugly) and girls (13.73 for pretty and 12.00 for ugly). A repeated measures analysis of variance confirmed that the drawings of the pretty person contained significantly more developmental indicators than the drawings of the ugly

person, $F(1,27) = 14.27$, $p < .001$. Individual comparisons computed via Tukey tests using pooled error terms revealed that this difference was significant for both males, $q(27) = 5.64$, $p < .01$, and females, $q(27) = 5.24$, $p < .01$. For some individuals the developmental difference between the two drawings was quite large. For example, there was one child whose score on the ugly-person drawing, if converted to mental age, would have placed her a full two years below her mental age on the pretty-person drawing. Moreover, the significant statistical difference in the analysis was not the result of a few isolated children affecting the group mean. The majority of children (17) scored at a higher developmental level on their pretty-person drawing; only 5 children showed an opposite pattern and 7 children remained at the same developmental level. A Chi-square analysis revealed this difference in score patterns to be significant, $\chi^2(2) = 8.54$, $p < .05$.

The finding of significant differences between the pretty-person and ugly-person drawings raises an interesting question: Did the instructions to draw a pretty person enhance the child's drawing, and consequently the estimate of his/her mental age, or did instructions to draw an ugly person depress them, or both? In an effort to answer this question, the children's drawings under neutral conditions from the preliminary session were scored and compared with the pretty-person and ugly-person drawings. The means for both boys (10.50) and girls (13.47) suggest that the instructions to draw a pretty person had only a slight and nonsignificant enhancing effect, indicating that most of the difference between the pretty-person and ugly-person drawings was due to drawing an ugly person.

Differences in the drawings were also found on the Koppitz scale. There were significantly more emotional indicators on the drawings of an ugly person ($\bar{X} = 2.43$ for males; 1.40 for females) than on the pretty person ($\bar{X} = 1.14$ for

males; 0.87 for females) drawings, F (1,27) = 17.68, p <.003. Individual comparisons showed that this ugly-pretty difference was slightly more pronounced for boys, $q(27) = 8.60$, p <.01; than for girls, $q(27) = 3.53$, p< .05. It is important to note that emotional indicators reflect emotionality during the process of drawing. Simple changes in facial expression, such as the changing a smile to a frown, are not considered in this analysis. The majority of children (15) exhibited more emotional indicators on the Koppitz scale in drawing an ugly person, 11 showed no change, and only 3 showed more emotional indicators on the drawing of a pretty person. This trend in score patterns was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 7.72$, p <.05, indicating that emotionality increased when drawing an ugly person for the majority of children.

The most notable emotional indicators in the depictions of the ugly person were teeth, long arms, and grotesque configurations. There is some evidence (Koppitz, 1968) to suggest that these features might be associated with aggressive and psychologically removed persons. Dion's (1973) research with young children to some extent also reflects this tendency toward behavioral attributions. In her study, preschoolers saw in their unattractive peers more negative social behavior, such as being less friendly and hitting without reason. To the child, "ugly" might be interpreted in both perceptual and behavioral terms, i.e. the ugly child is one who frowns and is angry and also is naughty and aggressive. This would be consistent with parental and adult usage as well. Most adults refrain from making adverse comments on physical appearance, for such comments would be rude, yet they do use words associated with physical appearance, such as "ugly", to refer to unacceptable behavior. Thus, the greater number of emotional indicators on the ugly-person drawing may have been partly the result of negative associations with

behavioral attributions to "ugly" persons.

Although sex or gender differences were not the focus of this study, it is interesting to note, consistent with previous research, that significant gender differences were found in both the preliminary drawings and the pretty-person and ugly-person drawings. Females attained significantly higher mean scores on the Goodenough scale, F (1,27) = 7.88, p <.01, and exhibited a trend toward fewer emotional indicators, F (1,27) = 2.68, p <.10. A number of researchers (e.g., Ford, Stern, and Dillon, 1977) have found girls to be more advanced in all areas of drawing.

Attribution research suggests that there is an important cultural stereotype with regard to physical attractiveness: what is beautiful is good and what is not beautiful is bad (Dion, et al., 1972). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that children as young as five and six years of age, who have been exposed to that cultural standard, demonstrate discriminations based on physical attractiveness that coincide with the cultural stereotype. The present data indicate that children can make these discriminations on the basis of purely verbal input.

The results of this study appear to have two important practical implications. The first of these stems from the finding that the child's drawing of a person leads to significantly different estimates of developmental maturity and indications of emotional disturbance depending on whether the child is asked to draw a pretty or an ugly person. Given the apparently strong influence that mild emotional states can have on the child's performance, and the ease with which these states can be induced by means of simple and unemotional variations in the verbal instructions to the subject, the examiner of young children should be particularly alert to transient emotional states in the child and cautious in interpreting test data with

young children.

The second implication is a broader one that relates to the general process of socialization. In order not to hamper children's interpersonal relationships with physically unattractive persons or the social interactions of children who are not physically attractive themselves, teachers, parents, and others involved in the socialization of young children should take special precautions against strengthening negative cultural stereotypes regarding physical attractiveness. It is worth noting in this connection that the distinction between "physically unattractive" and "physically different" is a subtle one that young children probably do not regularly make. Thus, this second implication takes on added importance for its potential contribution to our understanding of the problems of acceptance of physically handicapped persons and the roots of racial prejudice.

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FIGURE CAPTION

Figure 1. Drawings by five-year-old boy of pretty person (A) and ugly person (B) and by six-year-old girl of pretty person (C) and ugly person (D). All drawings are reduced 50%.

A

B

C

D